

Virginia Hechtman oral history, two cassettes

transcription J2024-001

Virginia Hechtman interviewed by Elinor Twohy and Lida Schneider

2 cassette tapes, recorded on March 27, 1984:

This is not an exact transcription as they all talk at once and circle topics.

Tape 1, side A:

No names are listed but the third voice has a sort of mid-Atlantic cultivation about it, a deeper voice than Elinor's, and late on side 2 of tape 2 they call her Leida.)

Three people chatting about who could recount memories about the Pomo—Molly? Elsie? I see basketmaker Elsie Allen in a 2010 #3 Sonoma Historian article about Warm Springs Dam by Lee Torliatt <https://northbaydigital.sonoma.edu/digital/collection/EHDC/id/2246/rec/24>

Elsie came and lived with Virginia in summer of 1967 or so – [Reno Hechtman emailed me, Feb. 8, 2021, that Elsie Allen is a legend at Fort Ross and among the Kashia Pomo.

Talking about Harry Furlong: “during a bad period” when he was killing people with his car (?) —a time when he came over with redwood posts for

Harry was the spoiled darling of the family, crazy as a loon. Virginia then has a fit because the tape recorder is on and she wouldn't want anything about Harry on tape! They promise to erase it. Then they turn off recorder.

Elinor: The big romance of the Indian family, we would never put that in our history.

Virginia was very involved with a lot of people who lived here a long time before the dredging fight. One man took her off to an orchard and confided that the dredger might find diamonds and titanium and other valuable things that could be on the island. There were commercial diamonds in Lake County that might have worked their way down the river. Virginia was also interested in the religious communes up by King Ridge about 125 years ago. They took lumber to coast on cables, got their supplies by boat. Up near the Boswell Jones Ranch (BB Jones house?) Richard Charter lived there. Now it's Cazadero.

They talk about the coffin handles, mostly repeating what Elinor had learned and written up about it. Wondering if the casket still had a skull in it. Bill recognized the type of pot metal in the handles and thinks it dates from about 60 years ago. If the island had not eroded they never would have found it. Elinor had interviewed the man who made the handles. They need an expert archeologist to look at the site. Bill thought he found disintegrating bones.

Virginia talks about incredible things Bill has found in the riverbank over the years. The case of an old pocket watch. The axle of a wagon. The coffin. This coffin predates the Santos family.

Nothing about the Penneys in the recorder's office. Seymours. State has not traced back earlier. "Harold" would know from his aunt and uncle—they had the original house. There was a big establishment on the island. This Cal is founder of Marin Conservation League, lives in LA. They haven't been able to reach him again. Maybe because he was getting divorced? His name was Harold Gregg. Had aunt and uncle or grandparents who knew about the island long ago!

We have a picture taken in the 1870s that shows a lot more ISLAND. And someone else who lived on the dunes remembered there was another island and a man used to play the trumpet there.

There was another man who played the trumpet on the island in the 1960s.

What happened to the island --- it was not abused at all when the Santos left. People began raiding it and hauling it off—the stuff and the topsoil—nice things. People who rented from Richard Hieb took things like hand-painted sinks. They thought the gravel pit was going to be on the island so they figured they were saving something. We were as guilty as the rest. Bill Hechtman was fascinated by the old tools. There were beautiful tools. He found lovely old hinges and tools.

In about 1965 they went up in the attic of the house looking for Indian baskets – Peter Hechtman went into it—and he found pounds and pounds of sugar still in the cloth sacks, hoarded during the war. Perfectly useful sugar!

The old hand-dug well lined with stones is still there. A boat with a large eye painted on it. Gorgeous barn. People who have camped there have now destroyed the barn.

Dr. Ellison (Olson?) told me a boy went out the Russian River and drowned. Two boys paddled out but couldn't get back. One of them was a Santos boy.

The smoke house was a perfect example of an early California ranch smoke house. That's near where the grave was.

Sounds like it really was 75 acres. There were several houses. It wasn't just a pile of gravel. They needed to show the viability of the island for wildlife. Because in Santa Rosa they talked about how useless it was. Some picture they had—a slide—showed deer on the island.

Noonans raised calla lilies by the ferry crossing. Ben Noonan. Ernest still living near Garberville.

Hechtmans had Pony Express things and Indian things and they gave them to the Bancroft Library.

How about the guy who used to be commanding officer here during the war? One of these women says she ran into him once at Fort Ross? Was he the one with the long white ponytail who rode a bike? You're kidding.

Tape 1, side 2:

A lot of Guerneville people know about this place down here.

When Richard Hieb moved in there, his place was full of treasures – old cavalry saddle! The whole house was full of “junk”—a treasure trove packed. Also garter snakes. People were afraid to go in there because of the snakes. Dr. Ellison knows about this too.

Elinor says she interviewed Dr. Ellison and he had nothing to say. They thought he would know a lot about the illnesses that killed the Indians here.

They are looking at the old tax bill that we [Jenner Archive] have for Penny Island, and another document from 1937 and 1941—something about the jetty and a Captain Nelson.

Then they are eating oatmeal cookies and laughing!

There was a rumor that someone was killed during the building of the jetty but it was denied. Someone else said half of Sonoma County came out and watched from the bluffs when they dynamited Goat Rock – just before it exploded a huge bank of fog came down and they couldn't see anything—just heard a big boom.

Diaries are so fascinating because – maybe there's a whole graveyard there. We can't be sure who was in that coffin either. Maybe Joe Santos put one of the old guys (a Mr. Penny?) he was taking care of in that coffin. Maybe Mr. Penny wanted to be buried there.

3rd speaker: Indians did not bury their dead until white people came and told them that they had to. Before that they cremated. Other voice --- they did bury in Santa Barbara.

Virginia speaks of books found on the island and a diary stuffed in the back of one of the books! The writing was so different, obviously Spenserian and difficult to read. [Where is this?]

The four coffin handles (only four, not six) were all there (but they say the head of the casket is was still jammed in the bank – maybe there other handles are still there by the head?) 3rd voice says they should have an archeologist dig. Did this ever happen???? Virginia says it's eroding fast and may be gone in next storm. At one point her description suggests it is on the Hechtmans' bank—she says you couldn't reach the site without crossing private land unless you come by boat. But later she says it's on the island.

Bill is a highly trained observer. He trained himself as a boy though hunting in the Sacramento Valley. He sees everything.

This was probably a busy populated place during the logging area. And hundreds of Indian encampments in the area. The only known Indian War was up in the hills between Camp Meeker and Willow Creek.

Elsie's grandmother lived to be 125 years old. What was grandmother's name? Three sisters—

Mary Salvador, Mary Keat (sp?), and one other. She remembered bringing children bound together by ropes down to work in the missions! They'd stop at these encampments, untie the children and let the Indian mothers take care of them, and then bind them up again and take them to work at the mission in Sonoma.

Have they asked the funeral home in Healdsburg about records? Sounds like no.

Josephine came back here in 1937. She was taken to Cazadero as a baby and then she married. Her father was Joe Santos and she used to visit him there, but she never lived there. She has pictures.

There was a little row of houses on the dunes by the [cypress] trees. Not by the ranger's house but right on the dunes. Josephine says the family calls that the old country.

Cassette # 2, side 1—

Much of it has been taped over with a radio program.

Then it takes up again with the three women talking about Drake's treasure —a rumor or belief that he had buried something here.

Another "myth" to people now is that the Japanese would attack here in WWII.

During the dredging the myth was that they were going to get a yellow submarine with a black Labrador dog—we had fantasies about going out in the night and knocking down the tower or getting Barbara Milhouse and her family to take it down.

This place [Jenner] seems simple but it is a complex place because of the convergence of the river and the ocean and the lack of old families—instead people coming from all over.

It's a happy accident that some of the Kashia survived. This little tribe over here is just gone. As recently as Elsie's time she and Molly were out gathering roots on a gravel bar by Healdsburg and all of a sudden, she felt there was someone behind her and there was a guy with a gun behind her. Somehow, they turned him away. They were noble people—their theory was always to retreat to a haven, not to get involved in a ... but a whole different attitude about life, no concept of private property.

MORE HERE: unclear reminiscences of Indians they knew and how they lived when very old.

Even Mr. Smith and his wife were in their eighties. They looked so wonderful walking around.

Elsie can remember staying all night at Duncans Mills station to wait for the train in the morning. Or got up at dawn to walk there. She was put in the school up in the Eel area—Covolo? And she remembered when she and her best friend were speaking in their native language to each other — they were punished by being put on a bread and water diet and tied up in the attic (?)

Laura Summerstall (?) escaped going to school entirely and of course she knows the language. She's a Wappo, part Wappo. She's very bitter that she never learned to read English. I've heard she was an intelligent woman. "That's what my sister says," one of them said.

While we have you, Virginia, tell us about the old ranch families:

Furlongs. The ranch by the ferry tender's house. Ben Noonan's mother lived there.

Ben Noonan at the time I knew him was a real drunk. You know, he'd

Side 2:

VH: When I knew the ranch people, some of them were reluctant to talk because they were so interrelated, almost incestuous, that they had a lot of crazies in their families. When I knew Harry Furlong he was a drunk and a violent man. You must have been here when he killed the mother of the [his?] two children with his car. He killed a number of people drunk driving and they'd put him in prison and then they'd get him out. His family and his wife just you know protected him and protected him. And he was a scary person. In fact people who grew up around the area, they used to say, if he doesn't get killed in an accident, somebody's going to kill him! They really thought that that's what would happen.

Again there are an awful lot of Furlongs. The ones we know live up on the Call Ranch. [Now Fort Ross.] [Uncertain about who that is or who Nancy is?] There's a Furlong at Markham. One at Pacific View. Furlong Road on the way to... [tape skips]

While I'm on that subject—the Wrights—the carpenter who worked on our Pole House. Remember the barn that fell down—that house is where one of the Wright Brothers [Grover] had his honeymoon and built an airplane there. The original Wrights were here in the 1870s but maybe he was a relative. Bill and I were fascinated. He was our carpenter. He was General Patton's Sergeant York. An absolute deadeye. He went in as the sharpshooter ahead of Patton who went in to get the German sharpshooters. He was cute. A real character. What was his name. His son was Leonard.

Betty Mann told me the Wright family lived in Santa Rosa.

Where is Betty Mann? I never see her. She's working hard on the ranch. Elinor said she had talked to her about lambs. Well, I heard she'd left Oscar. I know she left him a couple of times, not surprised. No, they think she is still there.

VH: The Wright people sold to the Army / Coast Guard—that's probably the first time [they sold] but that's not on our deed.

Do we have any record of Italians or Portuguese owning any land here after the Wrights. How about the dentist who had hundreds of sort of feral donkeys there?

ET: Socaros? At the time of the bootlegging? We heard they came into Goat Rock.

VH: I used to see them late at night. There'd be boat and then a car waiting and it flashed the lights. I think it was Mr. Bigelow who saw them one night in 1972—probably it was dope. You could see how easily and how dangerous. They were dropping it on to the other side of Goat Rock where skin divers could go (south?) Why Goat Rock? In Prohibition there were no roads then but there were wagon trails....

The people that worked on our Pole House lived at that house where the donkeys were.

Everybody seems to blame us for state parks wanting to remove houses.

Did anybody live across from Blind Beach ? There are multitudes of domesticated plants there amongst the rocks – amaryllises—a big spring there. Something about all those flowering plants on the parking lot side—Bill and I think it seems like there was a house there. Maybe they took down a house to build a parking lot?

VH: Speaking of that, I talked to Ernie Carpenter's lady about meeting. She proposed April 2. Maybe a fundraiser? [for his BoS campaign?] I want him to learn about us. He knows about the coalition in the old days – but that's eight years ago—I don't really know him any more. I'm going to go see him. I have a lot of tips on things I helped Eric [Konigshoffer?] with. I want to find out where the money went from Eric. When I knew Ernie he was just a wonderful young man. We had perfect records that we passed on to Eric.

The third speaker: Mr. Charles has a detached retina. I can go to the meetings until April. One of the other two calls this speaker Lida.

VH: When I first came here there was ... A dormitory for farmhands. Or maybe the old house. Richard Hieb I think told me that was the old Penny house. Joe copied a house from one on the dunes. In the 1920s. There was this bigger house that sat back on the other side. The fences went clear across except where the channel was. They grazed their cattle in what we call our meadow. The structures I knew are now totally gone. A toolshed.

Who got paid the money--- I heard it was \$40,000 – the Boy Scouts wanted it. It was re-sold after [this is totally unclear] Some of the deals were very shady, bad news. Idadell and Margaret were so desperate to seal the doom of that gravel company that they met with this lobbyist. They tried to get a rider that would include Hechtman land with the island. They would do anything to protect the land by getting it to state parks.

They draw to a close. Someone is coming to the Hechtmans'. John said we need to write down what we know and not worry about the big picture or project. Elinor says they'll screen out what cannot go to the public.

Virginia says. There were literally threats on my life. They were out to kill me! I was protected by the Highway Patrol when I drove home from Guerneville. They were really desperate people. I don't want to go through that again. It was all over with when Tindall was the Guerneville sheriff. They were watching for me at Bridgehaven but luckily I was driving my son's car. And I told that sheriff and he stopped it. He was in thick as thieves with all of those people....

End of J2024-001